THIRD WORLD TRAVELER

Why US Leaders Intervene Everywhere

excerpted from the book

The Terrorism Trap

by Michael Parenti

City Lights Books, 2002

Washington policymakers claim that US intervention is motivated by a desire to fight terrorism, bring democracy to other peoples, maintain peace and stability in various regions, defend our national security, protect weaker nations from aggressors, oppose tyranny, prevent genocide, and the like. But if US leaders have only the best intentions when they intervene in other lands, why has the United States become the most hated nation in the terrorist's pantheon of demons? And not only Muslim zealots but people from all walks of life around the world denounce the US government as the prime purveyor of violence and imperialist exploitation. Do they see something that most Americans have not been allowed to see?

Supporting the Right

Since World War II, the US government has given some $240 billion in military aid to build up the military and internal security forces of more than eighty other nations. The purpose of this enormous effort has been not to defend these nations from invasion by foreign aggressors but to protect their various ruling oligarchs and multinational corporate investors from the dangers of domestic anticapitalist insurgency. That is what some of us have been arguing. But how can we determine that? By observing that (a) with few exceptions there is no evidence suggesting that these various regimes have ever been threatened by attack from neighboring countries; (b) just about all these "friendly" regimes have supported economic systems that are integrated into a global system of

corporate domination, open to foreign penetration on terms that are singularly favorable to transnational investors; (c) there is a great deal of evidence that US-supported military and security forces and death squads in these various countries have been repeatedly used to destroy reformist movements, labor unions, peasant organizations, and popular insurgencies that advocate some kind of egalitarian redistributive politics for themselves.

For decades we were told that a huge US military establishment was necessary to contain an expansionist world Communist movement with its headquarters in Moscow (or sometimes Beijing). But after the overthrow of the Soviet Union and other Eastern European communist nations in 1989-1991, Washington made no move to dismantle its costly and dangerous global military apparatus. All Cold War weapons programs continued in full force, with new ones being added all the time, including the outer-space National Missile Defense and other projects to militarize outer space. Immediately the White House and Pentagon began issuing jeremiads about a whole host of new enemies-for some unexplained reason previously overlooked-who menace the United States, including "dangerous rogue states" like Libya with its ragtag army of 50,000 and North Korea with its economy on the brink of collapse.

The real intentions of US national security state leaders can be revealed in part by noting whom they assist and whom they attack. US leaders have consistently supported rightist regimes and organizations and opposed leftist ones. The terms "Right" and "Left" are seldom specifically defined by policymakers or media commentators-and with good reason. To explicate the politico-economic content of leftist governments and movements is to reveal their egalitarian and usually democratic goals, making it much harder to demonize them. The "Left," as I would define it, encompasses those individuals, organizations, and governments that oppose the privileged interests of wealthy propertied classes, while advocating egalitarian redistributive policies and a common development beneficial to the general populace.

The Right too is involved in redistributive politics, but the distribution goes the other way, in an upward direction. Rightist governments and groups, including fascist ones, are dedicated to using the land, labor, markets, and natural resources of countries as so much fodder for the enrichment of the owning and investing classes. In almost every country including our own, rightist groups, parties, or governments pursue tax and spending programs, wage and investment practices, methods of police and military control, and deregulation and privatization policies that primarily benefit those who receive the bulk of their income from investments and property, at the expense of those who live off wages, salaries, fees, and pensions. That is what defines and distinguishes the Right from the Left.

In just about every instance, rightist forces are deemed by US opinion makers to be "friendly to the West," a coded term for "pro-capitalist." Conversely, leftist ones are labeled as "anti-democratic," "anti-American" and "anti-West," when actually what they are against is global capitalism.

While claiming to be motivated by a dedication to human rights and democracy, US leaders have supported some of the most notorious rightwing autocracies in history, governments that have tortured, killed or otherwise maltreated large numbers of their citizens because of their dissenting political views, as in Turkey, Zaire, Chad, Pakistan, Morocco, Indonesia, Honduras, Peru, Colombia, Argentina, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti,

the Philippines, Cuba (under Batista), Nicaragua (under Somoza), Iran (under the Shah), and Portugal (under Salazar).

Washington also assists counterrevolutionary groups that have perpetrated some of the most brutal bloodletting against civilian populations in leftist countries: Unita in Angola, Renamo in Mozambique, the contras in Nicaragua, the Khmer Rouge (during the 1980s) in Cambodia, the mujahideen and then the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the rightwing drug-dealing KLA terrorists in Kosovo. All this is a matter of public record although seldom if ever treated in the US media.

Washington's support has extended to the extreme rightist reaches of the political spectrum. Thus, after World War 11 US leaders and their Western capitalist allies did nothing to eradicate fascism from Europe, except for prosecuting some top Nazi leaders at Nuremberg. In short time, former Nazis and their collaborators were back in the saddle in Germany. Hundreds of Nazi war criminals found a haven in the United States and Latin America, either living in comfortable anonymity or employed by US intelligence agencies during the Cold War.

In France, very few Vichy collaborators were purged. "No one of any rank was seriously punished for his or her role in the roundup and deportation of Jews to Nazi camps." US military authorities also restored fascist collaborators to power in various Far East nations. In South Korea, police trained by the fascist Japanese occupation force were used after the war to suppress left democratic forces. The South Korean Army was commanded by officers who had served in the Imperial Japanese Army, some of whom had been guilty of horrid war crimes in the Philippines and China.

ln Italy, within a year after the war, almost all Italian fascists were released from prison while hundreds of communists and other leftist partisans who had been valiantly fighting the Nazi occupation were jailed. Allied authorities initiated most of these measures. In the three decades after the war, US government agencies gave an estimated $75 million to right-wing organizations in Italy. From 1969 to 1974, high-ranking elements in Italian military and civilian intelligence agencies, along with various secret and highly placed neofascist groups embarked upon a campaign of terror and sabotage known as the "strategy of tension," involving a series of kidnappings, assassinations, and bombing massacres directed against the growing popularity of the democratic parliamentary Left. In 1995, a deeply implicated CIA, refused to cooperate with an Italian parliamentary commission investigating this terrorist campaign.

In the 1980s, scores of people were murdered in Germany, Belgium, and elsewhere in Western Europe by rightwing terrorists in the service of state security agencies. As with the earlier "strategy of tension" in Italy, the attacks attempted to create enough popular fear and uncertainty to undermine the existing social democracies. The US corporate-owned media largely ignored these events.

Attacking the Left

We can grasp the real intentions of US leaders by looking at who they target for attack, specifically just about all leftist governments, movements, and popular insurgencies. The methods used include (a) financing, infiltrating, and co-opting their military, and their internal security units and intelligence agencies, providing them with police-state

technology including instruments of torture; (b) imposing crippling economic sanctions and IMF austerity programs; (c) bribing political leaders, military leaders, and other key players; (d) inciting retrograde ethnic separatists and supremacists within the country; (e) subverting their democratic and popular organizations; (f) rigging their elections; and (g) financing collaborationist political parties, labor unions, academic researchers, journalists, religious groups, nongovernmental organizations, and various media.

US leaders profess a dedication to democracy. Yet over the past five decades, democratically elected reformist governments-"guilty" of introducing egalitarian redistributive economic programs in Guatemala, Guyana, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Syria, Indonesia (under Sukarno), Greece, Cyprus, Argentina, Bolivia, Haiti, the Congo, and numerous other nations-were overthrown by their respective military forces funded and advised by the US national security state. The intent behind Washington's policy is seen in what the US-sponsored military rulers do when they come to power. They roll back any reforms and open their countries all the wider to foreign corporate investors on terms completely favorable to the investors.

The US national security state has participated in covert actions or proxy mercenary wars against reformist or revolutionary governments in Cuba, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Portugal, Nicaragua, Cambodia, East Timor, Western Sahara, Egypt, Cambodia, Lebanon, Peru, Iran, Syria, Jamaica, South Yemen, the Fiji Islands, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. In many cases the attacks were terroristic in kind, directed at "soft targets" such as schools, farm cooperatives, health clinics, and whole villages. These wars of attrition extracted a grisly toll on human life and frequently forced the reformist or revolutionary government to discard its programs and submit to IMF dictates, after which the US-propelled terrorist attacks ceased.

Since World War 11, US forces have invaded or launched aerial assaults against Vietnam, Laos, the Dominican Republic, North Korea, Cambodia, Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, Libya, Iraq, Somalia, Yugoslavia, and most recently Afghanistan-a record of direct military aggression unmatched by any communist government in history. US/NATO forces delivered round-the-clock terror bombings on Yugoslavia for two and a half months in 1999, targeting housing projects, private homes, hospitals, schools, state-owned factories, radio and television stations, government owned hotels, municipal power stations, water supply systems, and bridges, along with hundreds of other nonmilitary targets at great loss to civilian life. In some instances, neoimperialism has been replaced with an old-fashioned direct colonialist occupation, as in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia where US troops are stationed, and more recently in Afghanistan.

In 2000-2001, US leaders were involved in a counterinsurgency war against leftist guerrilla movements in Colombia. They also were preparing the public for moves against Venezuela, whose president, Hugo Chavez, is engaged in developing a popular movement and reforms that favor the poor. Stories appearing in the US press tell us that Chavez is emotionally unstable, autocratic, and bringing his country to ruin, the same kind of media hit pieces that demonized the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, the New Jewel Movement in Grenada, Allende in Chile, Noriega in Panama, Qaddafi in Libya, Milosevic in Yugoslavia, and Aristide in Haiti, to name some of the countries that were subsequently attacked by US forces or surrogate mercenary units.

Governments that strive for any kind of economic independence, or apply some significant portion of their budgets to not-for-profit public services, are the ones most

likely to feel the wrath of US intervention. The designated "enemy" can be (a) a populist military government as in Panama under Omar Torrijos (and even under Manuel Noriega), Egypt under Gamal Abdul Nasser, Peru under Juan Velasco, Portugal under the leftist military officers in the MFA, and Venezuela under Hugo Chavez; (b) a Christian socialist government as in Nicaragua under the Sandinistas; (c) a social democracy as in Chile under Salvador Allende, Jamaica under Michael Manley, Greece under Andreas Papandreou, Cyprus under Mihail Makarios, and the Dominican Republic under Juan Bosch; (d) an anticolonialist reform government as in the Congo under Patrice Lumumba; (e) a Marxist-Leninist government as in Cuba, Vietnam, and North Korea; (f) an Islamic revolutionary order as in Libya under Omar Qaddafi; or even (g) a conservative militarist regime as in Iraq under Saddam Hussein if it should attempt an independent course on oil quotas and national development.

The goal of US global policy is the Third Worldization of the entire world including Europe and North America, a world in which capital rules supreme with no labor unions to speak of; no prosperous, literate, well-organized working class with rising expectations; no pension funds or medical plans or environmental, consumer, and occupational protections, or any of the other insufferable things that cut into profits.

While described as "anti-West" and "anti-American," just about all leftist governments-from Cuba to Vietnam to the late Soviet Union-have made friendly overtures and shown a willingness to establish normal diplomatic and economic relations with the United States. It was not their hostility toward the United States that caused conflict but Washington's intolerance of the alternative class systems they represented.

In the post-World War II era, US policymakers sent assistance to Third World nations, and put forth a Marshall plan, grudgingly accepting reforms that produced marginal benefits for the working classes of Western Europe and elsewhere. They did this because of the Cold War competition with the Soviet Union and the strong showing of Communist parties in Western European countries. But today there is no competing lure; hence, Third World peoples (and working populations everywhere) are given little consideration in the ongoing campaigns to rollback the politico-economic democratic gains won by working people in various countries...

- **Michael Parenti page**
- **Authors page**
- **Home Page**